
DARK DAYS

By Jessie Ethel Sherwin

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"We're shut up. Go away!"

Thus John Wylie, gruff, almost vicious, he who had never in his life before spoken an unkind word or refused a favor or a kindness to human or animal.

There was some excuse. John was at the end of his rope—financially, physically and mentally. Life had gone hard with him. He had finished all but one year at a medical college when the bank failed in which he had deposited the means of finishing his college course and a surplus to float him into practice in a modest but respectable way.

He knew considerable of therapeutics, however, and he qualified as a prescription clerk and secured a very good position in a downtown drug store. He scrimped and saved, for he had an ambition to be his own master. The chance came. He saw the advertisement of a druggist forced to sell out "on account of ill health." John looked grewsome as he viewed the locality. The store was located in a wretchedly poor tenement district. His plausible predecessor painted a glowing picture of lots of sickness, therefore a steady demand for remedies.

"Of course, it's a dime at a time," he observed, "but there's a steady stream of them."

So John became a proprietor. Business was quite "steady," indeed, but at the end of the month he looked solemn and dubious. The volume of business had not been so bad, but half of it was on a credit basis. John, unused to the wiles of human nature, was easily played upon. All kinds of promises and excuses led him into the trap. Then, too, there were forcible calls on his sympathy from people who could never pay. His sympathetic heart went out to these. Who could refuse health, possibly

life, to a penniless mother or a dying child?

It was now the end of six months and John had balanced, or rather unbalanced his books. The result was appalling. His stock had dwindled to one-quarter of normal and he had neither the cash nor credit to replenish it. He was too honest to sell out to a dupe.

"What's left will barely pay what I owe," he groaned dismally. "I've got to close up shop."

So, at 8 o'clock that evening he turned off all the lights, crawled into



"The Murdering Villain!"

his clean but dreary bed under the counter and lay there, miserably going over the wretchedness of his tangled business affairs and seeing no way out.

Tap-tap-tap!

John buried his head in the bedclothes, resolved to be impervious to intrusion, no matter what the motive.

Tap-tap-tap! patient but insistent. John was obdurate. Then he became angry. The summons continued